

***TRAINING FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH THE  
EDUCATION OF THE WILL  
ACCORDING TO JACQUES MARITAIN<sup>1</sup>***

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**1. Religion, democracy, and education: the results of a personal itinerary**

The life of Jacques Maritain clearly confirms the statement of Ortega: “I am myself and my circumstances, and if I don’t save them, then neither do I save myself.” It is not possible to understand Maritain’s philosophical views concerning religion, democracy, and education if they are not examined through the lens of his personal life. Hence, the creation of philosophical works, like the *Introduction générale à la philosophie* (1923), and his many lectures given around the world not only were intended to clarify<sup>2</sup> his principal moral concepts, but were aimed at presenting them in a way that would lead to better understanding by his pupils. His life as a teacher<sup>3</sup> – as one always involved in higher education – led to the production of writings on a wide range of themes related to our topic.

Jacques Maritain was the son of a socialist and republican family. From the time he was a child, he had direct contact with liberal Christian Protestantism and with socialism; both had a strong influence on him and, throughout the rest

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<sup>2</sup> *Cfr.* Jacques Maritain, *Cuaderno de Notas*, Bilbao: Nuestro tiempo, 1967, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Cfr.* Henrí Bars, *Maritain en nuestros días*, Barcelona: Estela, 1962, p. 78.

of his life, and in different ways, he never completely abandoned his sympathy for either of them.<sup>4</sup>

At home, Maritain learned of the importance of being concerned with the welfare of the working class<sup>5</sup> and, over time, this concern expanded to include all of society. It was one of the central pillars of his democratic vision, and it was constant until his final days.

Yet Maritain's early liberal Christianity was no defence against a terrible personal crisis<sup>6</sup> – one that brought him to convert to Catholicism. This conversion was initially and intellectually provoked by his encounter with the writings of Henri Bergson.<sup>7</sup> Later, it extended to his whole being through the help of León Bloy, who made him realize that “reason asks to be baptized, because it is necessary for life to have its roots in faith”.<sup>8</sup> This religious itinerary left its mark on all of Maritain's principal philosophical views, and particularly those that involved democracy and education.

Another element that must be understood in order to fully appreciate the views of our author, is the role played by his wife, Raïssa. She profoundly influenced his life and his intellectual work<sup>9</sup>, and was his mainstay in all that he did. From the ideas that she expounded in such books as *Les grandes amitiés* (1949) or *Histoire d'Abraham* (1947), one may believe that Raïssa was not a great thinker, but when we consider closely what she wrote, we can appreciate her mystical and poetic sensitivities, and her deep appreciation of art that permeates not only her own work but many of the main ideas of Jacques.

Of course, for the purposes of this paper, the key feature of Maritain's personal and intellectual life was his Thomism; it was a philosophy that Maritain himself renewed in a very personal way, filtered through and contrasted with authors such as Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, and Soren Kierkegaard. And, in relation to our present topic, it is important to note that Maritain thoroughly respected the first directory line of St. Thomas – that which Charles Blanchet calls the “three first illuminations”<sup>10</sup>; that is, the intuition of being and reality;

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *La Persona y el Bien común*, Buenos Aires: Club de lectores, 1968, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Maritain, *Cuaderno de Notas*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Raïssa Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés*, New York: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Maritain, *Cuaderno de Notas*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Blanchet, *L'Humanisme intégral de Jacques Maritain*, Paris: Saint-Paul, 1988, pp. 51-53.

the mystery of truth in this; and, thirdly, the recognition that this reality could be discovered at any time through the use of human intelligence – by each person individually, and also jointly, with the rest of society.

For Maritain, this truth which is intimately linked with religion, exists in some way even in the false systems of thinking. It is in this truth that we find the end or goal<sup>11</sup> – which is ultimately religious – of our existence, and that orders the whole of human life. It is through the discovery of this truth that we are able to participate in God's life; more precisely, it is through this that we have the relationship between the world of the grace which is given by God and the inner movement of our own free will.

## **2. The education of the will in the person and the individual.**

The differentiation that Maritain makes between the human person and the individual human being has been the subject of some polemic – and it has also been frequently misunderstood.

For Maritain, human beings have a super-existence<sup>12</sup> that is quite different from their physical constitution and is located at a higher level and rooted in the spiritual world. This is the world of the person: "Man is a person, who possesses himself through his intelligence and his will. His existence is not merely physical. He has in himself a richer and more noble existence, which is the spiritual super-existence appropriate to knowledge and to love."<sup>13</sup>

In Maritain, neither the person nor personality are fully finished. The person is not totally given the moment he appears; rather, he is a subject of perfection, where the responsibility for that perfecting is borne principally by the person and secondly by society. The person has to complete himself through the appropriate use of his liberty from adulthood until death. This is a task that belongs to every single person; it is something that both requires an intense effort and is impossible to renounce. Human beings are helped by society by means of the education<sup>14</sup> that guides them in their development, until they are fully formed human persons.

Maritain also speaks of the individual. The individual represents those elements that are related to the material and the body, the instincts, and that

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *Filosofía Moral*, Madrid: ed. Morata, 1966, p. 524.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *Principes d'une politique humaniste*, Paris: ed. Saint-Paul, 1989, O. C, Vol VIII, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*, Paris: ed. Saint-Paul, 1988, O. C, Vol VII, pp. 776-777.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *Ibid*, p. 779.

which Maritain calls ‘not specific to humankind’ – in other words, all that is physical. Yet the individual dimension is also that through which man can take part in society; society is comprised of individuals.

Following Aristotle, Maritain thinks that the spirit or the soul (which he understands as the same) is the body’s form, and so it is not strange to itself. Thus, the life of both aspects, person and individual, body and spirit, is maintained and developed by activities which are different and reciprocal at the same time. The mutual connexion of these dimensions assures the end and the last finality of human acts.

Thus, in Maritain, the singular is the way to create the personal act of being; singularly I believe and know. It is in the singular that I act in concrete circumstances using my personal will. In the singular, the person becomes enslaved or liberated. The singular is, in other words, a condition for personal liberty, and so is the use of the individual will.

The body is the ‘circumstance’ of the soul. Therefore, in order to know and to judge with perfect rightness the singular facts that each particular person should accomplish, it is not possible to use a purely abstract morality, even if there could be one.<sup>15</sup> The universal rule of morality must be applied, taking into account the person and the circumstance. This perfect adaptation of the universal to the particular can only take place in a spiritual, educated will acting in the concrete moment; it is then a virtuous will, that patterns the spiritual, the corporeal, and the social, toward the universal rule of morality.

Talking about the importance of the individual, Jean-Louis Allard<sup>16</sup>, in opposition to others like Julio Meinville<sup>17</sup>, rejects any allegation of Manicheism in Maritain, finding in Maritain’s works an indivisible unity of the person with the individual, the goodness of both aspects, and its different treatment in relation to the world of education.

In other words, the education of man is not the rearing of an animal<sup>18</sup> because, as Maritain says, “the most important educational task is a perpetual appeal to the Intelligence and the free Will of the child.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Cfr.* Jacques Maritain, *Du régime temporel et de la liberté*, Paris : ed. Saint-Paul, 1982, O. C, Vol V, ed, p. 341.

<sup>16</sup> *Cfr.* Jean Louis Allard, *L'éducation à la liberté*, Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1978, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Cfr.* Julio Meinville, *Crítica de la concepción de Maritain sobre la persona humana*, Buenos Aires: ed. Nuestro Tiempo, 1948, pp. 38-39.

<sup>18</sup> *Cfr.* Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*, p. 778.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 779.

The role of the human will in relation to these concepts is fundamental, because man has to complete<sup>20</sup>, with his Will, that which in nature is just a sketch. Man has only two possible options: to follow the way of the person and the spirit, or to seek the path of the individual, which means material reality.

### **3. The education of personal free will for the life in a free community**

In Sartre,<sup>21</sup> the teleological and communitarian construct of liberty is empty because, on his view, free will makes sense only in the *en soi* or *pour soi*. Therefore, for Sartre, there is no human essence, only a material existence.<sup>22</sup> In this existence, others always appear as physical obstacles to the true exercise of freedom.

In Maritain, however, others – that is, society – are not only important, but necessary for the right and healthy development of personal liberty. Maritain writes:

If man is by nature a political animal, that means that society, as required by nature, reaches its full realization through his free consent, and that the human person demands the communication of social life because of the openness and the generosity appropriate to intelligence and love, and because of the needs of an individual who is born bereft of all.<sup>23</sup>

Maritain shares the view of Aristotle and Ortega<sup>24</sup> and opposes that form of moral liberalism that conceives of society as a “contractual product”. He believes that a society is not born by a voluntary agreement of individual wills; rather, he believes the opposite – that any genuine voluntary agreement presupposes the existence of a society of people who live together. This is the reason why education has to be education for liberty and for free people in a free and responsible community<sup>25</sup>.

But we must add that Maritain’s position is not that of socialist educators who believe that human essence does not exist except through life in society. For them, education is just a method of socialisation – which means the only way of

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. Maritain, *La Persona y el Bien común*, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. J. A. Arias Muñoz, *Jean Paul Sartre y la Dialéctica de la cosificación*, Madrid: ed. Cincel, 1987, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. Jean Paul Sartre, *L'existencialisme est une humanisme*, Paris: ed. Nagel, 1970, pp. 20-22.

<sup>23</sup> Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*, p. 784.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. José Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas*, Madrid: ed. Austral, 1997, pp. 44-45.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *La Educación en este momento crucial*, Buenos Aires: ed. Desclée de Brouwer, 1965, p. 124.

humanisation. Instead of this, Maritain maintains: “The essence of education indeed does not consist in having a future citizen adapt to the condition and the interactions of social life, rather, it primarily consists in *making a man* [...]; truly, the education for the community implies this, and requires above all the education of the person”<sup>26</sup> According to our author, then, the task of every state is to teach and to help the person toward the Common Good.

As Rigobello<sup>27</sup> tells us, training for democracy in Maritain is related to education for pluralism and, simultaneously, education in order to reach consensus and pursue the common search for the unique truth.

As a result of this, we see that there must be a process of deepening and grounding<sup>28</sup> that all Democracy has to follow – where religion cannot be ignored – and that every educational process has to seek<sup>29</sup>: this is the search for objective truth and for natural and social goals, that are required in order for one to find personal and collective liberation.

#### **4. The final goal for democratic Education: the formation of the spirit**

This dynamic that Maritain proposes, between the temporal and spiritual, was explained in many different ways and from different perspectives in works such as *Humanisme intégral* (1936), *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle* (1939), and *L'homme et l'Etat* (1951). In this dynamic, all of the dimensions of human beings are included. The first term, the temporal, has to be subordinated to the second<sup>30</sup>, the spiritual life. This relation of submission is just an ordination determined by the greater relevance of the spiritual world in human life.

But, in any case, this submission is not causative, because both realities are related but subsist in different worlds; as Maritain recognizes: “the temporal is submitted to the spiritual, not in causative dependency, not under the title of an instrumental agent”<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the education for democracy that Maritain

<sup>26</sup> Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*, p. 785.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Antonio Rigobello, *Jacques Maritain. Verità ideologia educazione*, Milano: rev. Vita e Pensiero, 1977, p. 109.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *The Education of Man*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976, pp. 39-43.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Piero Viotto, *Jacques Maritain Pedagogista*, Milano: rev. Cultura e Scuola n°47, luglio-settembre, 1973, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *Primacia de lo Espiritual*, Buenos Aires: ed. Club de Lectores, 1982, pp. 11-60.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Humanismo Integral*, Buenos Aires: ed. Carlos Lohlé, 1966, p. 135.

advocates, while it reflects concrete Catholic theology, would never be enclosed in a specific political system.

Nevertheless, the personal will has two concrete movements that always operate together. One is a personal one. This is the most important, through which the will opts for the good that the intelligence has offered. As Maritain says: “toward an object, toward an objective end that will measure and regulate them, not in a material way to enslave them. but spiritually in order to liberate them, for the object of knowledge and love is interiorized by the activities of the intelligence and the will”.<sup>32</sup> This is an inner action, targeted by the information given by the intelligence, and ordered and unified<sup>33</sup> by it. It is part of the spiritual life; it is real, and serves to build personal liberty – but only when the option is freely chosen, and only when the person chooses a true good and not an imaginary or a false one.

The development of this spiritual unity simultaneously entails the strength of the intelligence and the will because, as Payot says, “the energies of the Will are less explained by multiple efforts than by orienting the whole powers of the spirit toward one goal”.<sup>34</sup>

The second movement, linked with the first (though not as a consequence, but as indivisibly united with it), consists of the addition or the diminution that the individual will makes to the Common Good, and through which it contributes to the life in society – i.e., to democracy – or to its destruction.

In like manner, experience and spirit, the person and the individual, the concrete and the universal, are in constant ebb and flow. Hence, when the moral life becomes more internal, it is at the same time projected to the external life – the life of society.

Starting from Maritain’s original democratic concepts, the education of the will of the student consists in helping him to personally assume social rules, and seeking that which Maritain emphasizes: “The most important thing in the formation of Man, is the rightness of the will and the acquisition of internal freedom, through the establishment of a healthy relationship with society”<sup>35</sup>.

Thus, to show how this applies to the objectives of education, the democratic knowledge that we have to teach (adopting the idea that Allard<sup>36</sup> uncovers in

<sup>32</sup> Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l’éducation*, pp. 781.

<sup>33</sup> *Cfr. Ibid*, p. 916.

<sup>34</sup> Jules Payot, *L’éducation de la volonté*, Paris: ed. Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l’éducation*, p. 800.

<sup>36</sup> *Cfr. Allard, L’éducation à la liberté*, p. 91.

Maritain), should not be just a gymnastic of faculties, nor a passive grasp on the part of the student, but a very personal assumption of responsibility.

Of course, learning to obey is a way of learning to be free; the will is liberated when it obtains its proper object, even if – because of a lack of maturity – the person has not yet completely understood his personal and social goals. This task will be accomplished, as Viotto says: by “provoking the sense and the awareness of justice with the value of respect and equality for every single person in their diversity and in the social plurality.”<sup>37</sup>

Taking into account the meaning of human nature as explained above, for Maritain, the education of the will is similar to the medical art: *ars cooperativa natura*.<sup>38</sup>

Just as the doctor must heal the body using natural forces, the teacher has to induce the will of his students – producing internal and spiritual motions, using the internal energies of the student, and cooperating with these. This could only be possible by giving every single student personal treatment, which is a challenge for any educational system.

Nevertheless, beauty, in our author’s theory of art, is a property of the art object produced by the artist’s hand, and is related to order, to logic<sup>39</sup>, and to proportion; this integrity produces that splendour<sup>40</sup> that is *id quod visum placet*. Applying this idea to the education of the will, we can conclude that there is an external effort (which belongs to the educator), one intrinsic finality in the educational process, and a result, which is a beautiful educated will, helped to be free and which searches for freedom in conformity with a supreme and universal rule in a hidden order, which is intrinsically and uniquely given by the Catholic religion in the midst of a pluralistic democratic society.

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<sup>37</sup> Piero Viotto, *L'educazione alla Democrazia secondo J. Maritain*, in: *Il pensiero politico di J. Maritain*, Milano: rev. Vita e Pensiero, 1978, p. 302.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. Maritain, *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*, p. 917.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. Jacques Maritain, *Arte y Escolástica*, Buenos Aires: Club de lectores, 1972, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> “Integrity because the Intellect takes pleasure in the fullness of being; proportion or consonance, because the Intellect takes pleasure in the order and the unity; and splendour or clarity, because the Intellect takes pleasure in the light or in that which, emanating from things, determines what the Intellect sees”. Jacques Maritain, *La Poesía y el Arte*, Buenos Aires: ed. Emecé, 1955, p. 196.